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McGREGOR RANGE

RANGELAND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM DOCUMENT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
LAS CRUCES DISTRICT OFFICE

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RANGELAND MANAGEMENT PROGRAM DOCUMENT

Introduction

This document establishes management guidelines and describes livestock grazing decisions reached following completion of the McGregor Range Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The McGregor Range EIS area (Exhibit A), containing 515,000 acres of withdrawn public land and Army fee-owned land in Otero County, New Mexico, is controlled by the Department of the Army (DOA), Fort Bliss, Texas. These lands were purchased or withdrawn by DOA in 1957 to be used for research and testing of military ordnance. Prior to 1957, this area was composed of sheep or cattle ranches like most of the southwest. From 1957-1966, DOA closed McGregor Range to authorized grazing. In 1966, DOA designated a portion of the Range (515,000 acres) as a co-use area in which grazing could be permitted under supervision of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Since that time, 13 units have been developed and opened for grazing, and one new unit (Unit 2) will be opened for grazing in 1981. Table 1 shows the history of grazing use on the 14 units totaling 271,000 acres. The remaining 244,000 acres of the co-use area are no longer compatible with livestock grazing because of expanded military activities.

At present, range trend studies indicate 70 percent of the area is stable, 10 percent is up and 20 percent is down. Three percent of the area is in excellent range condition, 44 percent is good, 46 percent is fair, and only 7 percent is in poor condition.

Average utilization is 32 percent (light), but the distribution is poor. As a result, much of the existing forage is not used, and areas of heavy utilization exist around watering facilities due to concentration of livestock.

At present, an average of 42,300 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) of livestock grazing are allowed each year for a period of nine months, October 1 through June 30; 2,633 AUMs for deer and 160 AUMs for antelope are allotted annually. Prior to the beginning of each grazing season, the BLM decides which pastures will be grazed and the number of cattle that will be allowed in each pasture. These decisions are made by the professional range staff based on precipitation, utilization, trend indicators, and professional judgement. Awarding of contracts to graze livestock is determined by competitive bidding at public auction under provisions of the Federal Material Disposal Act of 1947. Income from grazing, which ranges from $119,000 to $238,000 per year, is retained for construction and maintenance of rangeland improvements, and supervision and administration of the grazing program on the range.

The Decision

A rangeland management program for the co-use portion of McGregor Range has been selected which includes implementation of an intensive grazing management system, a rangeland improvement program, and expanded monitoring. The proposed action supplemented with summer grazing from Alternative F was selected as the basis for this decision.

An intensive grazing management system will be developed to include flexible grazing seasons, periodic summer grazing, and some type of rotation grazing that provides periodic rest. This will provide for the proper use of key forage species in relation to their phenological requirements. Summer grazing would occur on some units to enable utilization of tobosa, sacaton, and other species which are not a primary forage resource under present management. In so doing, utilization of key forage species such as black grama, which is highly preferred during winter months, would be reduced.

Some units will be managed individually and some in combination with one to three other units. This will involve mixing combinations of units north as well as south of State Road 506.

As an integral part of the decision, a monitoring system which focuses on actual livestock numbers, range condition and trend, utilization of key forage species, and precipitation will be continued and expanded as needed. Results of the monitoring studies will be the major guide in determining any adjustments which may be required to meet objectives.

The major problem with the present program of grazing on McGregor is poor distribution of livestock grazing due primarily to the lack of adequate watering facilities. To remedy this problem, rangeland improvement projects will be implemented that will provide for the proper utilization of all grazing units by livestock and wildlife. Proposed improvements include pipelines, wells, storage tanks, troughs, dirt tanks, and corrals. The most critical element of these improvements is to replace 17 miles of the main pipeline which is the feeder line for all watering facilities in 11 of the 14 units. The success of the existing and proposed pipelines, storage tanks, and troughs are dependent on this main pipeline.

An Environmental Assessment (EA) will be required on each proposed improvement project to analyze site specific environmental impacts. Clearance will be obtained for archaeological resources, threatened and endangered species, Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs), and any other resources which require clearance.

Livestock AUMs are projected to increase from the present 42,300 to 57,230 by the year 1992. This increase will be a result of improved distribution which will allow utilization of forage not presently available due to excessive distance from water.

Present deer numbers will increase from an estimated 3,700 to 5,000 and present antelope numbers from an estimated 250 to 700 by the year 1992. This increase will result from increased availability of water and less competition for forage from livestock.

Due to this expected increase in deer and antelope numbers and a related increase in special hunting permits issued by the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, hunter visitor days are expected to increase from approximately 1,400 to 2,000.

The major economic benefit of this program will be an annual increase from approximately $1 million to $1.5 million for the livestock industry. These increased benefits would result from increases in AUMs, calf weights, and calf crops. Due to the bidding procedure and resulting erratic distribution of benefits from year to year, this program would have no systematic social or economic impact on either specific geographic areas or particular operators.

Funds for construction of all rangeland improvements are derived entirely from the sale of livestock forage on McGregor Range. As the sale of livestock AUMs increases, awarding of contracts for construction of improvement projects will increase. An estimated $1.3 million will be spent for improvement projects by the year 1992. This will be a minor economic benefit to the local industry because few successful bidders for contracts are from the local area.

The proposed program will provide the necessary actions to maintain present rangeland condition and trend on areas having good to excellent rangeland condition and stable to improving trend, and stabilize or improve the trend in other areas. It will also increase the harvest of available forage production from about 46,000 to 60,000 AUMs for utilization by cattle, deer, and antelope.

The only substantial adverse impacts could occur on 4,425 acres near proposed water facilities where rangeland condition may deteriorate by one condition class once cattle begin grazing and trampling around the newly developed facilities. No adverse impacts have been identified which would substantially alter visual resources, wilderness values, recreation, land use, transportation, or economic conditions. For these reasons, the combination of the two programs is considered environmentally preferable to any single alternative.

Related Actions

Culp Canyon is the only WSA identified in the EIS area (Exhibit A). Any management activities or improvements would be governed by BLM's interim management policy and surface protection regulations which require that no action be taken which would impair wilderness values.

A study designed to measure impacts of trampling by cattle on archaeological artifacts is being implemented this year on Unit 2.

When results are available from this study, they will be included in management decisions regarding livestock grazing on other areas.

Wildlife habitat studies that include browse utilization transects, pellet group transects, and fecal analysis comprise the present deer management program. These studies will continue in the proposed program and will eventually enable the BLM to develop a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) specifically for deer.

The New Mexico Department of Game and Fish, in coordination with the BLM and the DOA, schedules and supervises a special deer and antelope hunt each year on the co-use area of McGregor Range. The antelope hunt is restricted to muzzle loaders only. Approximately 25 permits are offered. The success ratio is generally low. The deer hunt is a rifle or bow hunt offering approximately 800 permits. The success ratio for the hunt is usually high.

An HMP is being developed this year which will establish a system to monitor forage and habitat requirements for antelope. The result of this program will affect recommendations and management decisions for wildlife habitat improvements.

The Alternatives

In addition to the proposed action, six alternative actions were considered and evaluated.

Since neither the proposed action nor any single alternative was adopted in its entirety, each is presented as an alternative which was considered.

Proposed Action

Major elements of this alternative are:

- No more than 50 percent of key forage species would be utilized each year by all grazing animals, compared to about 32 percent at present.
- The awarding of a contract to use livestock forage in a given pasture would continue to be determined by competitive bidding at public auction, or sealed bid.
- The livestock grazing season would continue to be from October 1 to June 30 (subject to the discretion of the BLM Area Manager).
- Livestock grazing would continue to be limited to cattle and three horses per pasture.
- Seventeen and one-half miles of existing pipelines would be replaced.
- Thirty-eight and one-half miles of new pipeline would be constructed.

- Nineteen wells, seventy-seven water troughs, thirty-nine water storage tanks, and five dirt tanks would be constructed.
- Three corrals would be constructed.
- Forty-seven miles of unimproved roads would be constructed, to provide access to proposed water facilities. The roads would be suitable for fair weather travel by conventional vehicles.
- As at present, water for wildlife would be provided year-round in each pasture.
- As at present, no grazing would be allowed on the 244,000 acres of the co-use area which are areas A and B. (Exhibit A)
- BLM would continue to maintain and repair all grazing-related facilities, except that lessees would be responsible for maintenance of boundary fences and gates during the grazing season.
- Lessees would be required to place salt and protein supplements at least 0.5 miles from water.
- As necessary, BLM would cause livestock redistribution by rotating access to water supplies, provided that restricted supplies were not needed by wildlife.
- Implementation of the proposed action would involve an extensive monitoring program. Results of the monitoring would be used to determine the need for the periodic resting of pastures or the adjustment of stocking levels.

The objectives of this alternative are to implement a grazing management system which will create uniform distribution of livestock grazing and increase the harvest of available forage from about 46,000 AUMs to about 60,000 AUMs for utilization by cattle and wildlife.

This alternative was not selected in its entirety because the proposed nine month grazing season (October-June) does not provide for the proper utilization of tobosa, sacaton, and other plant species which are most palatable during the summer. All other elements of this alternative are incorporated into the selected program.

No Action

This alternative would continue with the existing program. New improvements would not be constructed, expanded monitoring would not take place, and an intensive grazing management system would not be developed. About 42,000 AUMs would continue to be offered at public auction, wildlife numbers would remain unchanged, and the grazing season would continue to be nine months long (with summer rest).

This alternative was not chosen because it does not remedy any of the existing problems. Existing productivity levels would be sustained, but much of the forage would continue to be unharvested. Stagnation would continue to be evident over large areas due to nonuse of forage. A downward trend in rangeland condition with a related deterioration in productivity, cover, and vigor would continue on 4,400 acres near existing watering facilities. Distribution patterns and resulting utilization patterns would remain uneven.

Discontinue Livestock Grazing

This alternative would end BLM's involvement on McGregor Range. Authorized livestock utilization would cease, and DOA would have responsibility for maintenance of existing rangeland improvements and construction of any new ones, essentially for wildlife.

This alternative was not selected because it is contrary to the the objectives of BLM pertaining to land use. Existing environmental conditions would not improve substantially because present grazing pressure is relatively light. However, the downward trend on 4,400 acres near existing watering facilities would be reversed. Plant stagnation over large areas would be evident due to the nonuse of forage.

Existing annual benefits of approximately $994,800 to livestock operators who successfully bid for livestock forage would cease, as well as $232,650 (estimate) received by the BLM for maintenance and improvement on the range. Deer numbers would decrease from 3,730 to 2,548 due to lack of maintenance of existing watering facilities. This alternative would not develop the rangeland to its maximum potential for those resources which are present.

Add Grazing in Area A

This alternative incorporates all aspects of the proposed action as well as developing Area A for grazing. (Exhibit A) Area A would be divided into three new pastures totaling 84,000 acres and would provide 11,703 additional AUMs. This alternative would create a more even distribution of livestock, increase the number of cattle and wildlife AUMs and introduce grazing into Area A.

This alternative would reduce grazing pressure around present watering facilities (4,400 acres), but there would be major changes in vegetation around new water facilities (5,075 acres) such as reduction of cover and production due to heavy grazing and trampling.

This alternative was not selected because DOA has developed this portion of the co-use area for testing of military ordnance. According to DOA, the military mission is no longer compatible with livestock grazing in Area A.

Change Grazing Season to October-March

This alternative would implement the proposed action with the exception that the grazing season would be changed from nine months to six months, October-March. The objective of this alternative is to give cool season plants rest during their growing season.

This alternative was not selected because the number of AUMs would be the same as for the selected program, but livestock numbers on the range during a six-month grazing season would be 50 percent more than the number for the selected program.

The selected program will provide some growing season rest for cool season plants each year without the 50 percent increase in cattle numbers due to the shorter grazing season.

The increased number of cattle for six months as proposed under this alternative would cause twice as many acres (8,850) to decrease one condition class as compared to the selected program.

Change Grazing Season to October-March and Reduce Grazing

Under this alternative, the proposed action would be implemented with the exception that the grazing season would be six months, from October-March, and AUMs would be reduced by one-third.

The objective of this alternative is to give cool season plants rest during their growing season. It proposes to reduce AUMs by one-third in order to reduce the total number of cattle on the range during a six month grazing season. This alternative was not chosen because the selected program provides cool season rest for some units each year without decreasing AUMs.

Reduce grazing in units 3, 4, and 5 and provide for summer grazing

This alternative is similar to the proposed action except for two major changes. First, livestock grazing would be reduced in unit 3 and eliminated in units 4 and 5. Second, summer grazing would be allowed on some units to enable utilization of tobosa, sacaton, and other species which normally are not a primary winter forage resource.

The objective of this alternative is to reduce competition between deer and cattle in prime deer habitat while at the same time offsetting the decrease in cattle AUMs by providing summer grazing.

The summer grazing portion of this alternative has been incorporated into the selected program. If future wildlife studies indicate that substantial competition between deer and cattle

exist in units 3, 4, and 5, a change in the grazing season or a reduction in grazing will be initiated as provided for in the selected program.

Public Involvement

Opportunities for public involvement have been provided at all stages of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process.

Preparation of Draft EIS

The BLM published in the Federal Register on May 24, 1979, a Notice of Intent to Prepare an EIS. A copy of the Notice of Intent was sent to the New Mexico State Planning Division. A public meeting to solicit public information, concerns, problems, and issues for possible inclusion in the impact statement was held in Alamogordo on June 28, 1979. This meeting was publicized in local newspapers in June 1979. No formal statements were submitted at the meeting and no subsequent correspondence was received.

During preparation of the document, the EIS team sought expertise and opinions from local, State, and Federal agencies, as well as universities and private individuals. Communications varied from formal written comments to informal personal contacts.

Review of the Draft EIS (DEIS)

The DEIS was made available to the public on April 18, 1980. The Notice of Availability, published in the April 23, 1980 Federal Register, announced a 60-day public review period ending June 17, 1980.

Over 300 copies of the DEIS were distributed to reviewing agencies and the interested members of the general public with a cover letter summarizing the proposed action and announcing the time and location of the scheduled public hearing.

Copies of the DEIS were also made available to the public in several libraries and at the BLM offices in New Mexico, as well as the BLM Office of Public Affairs in Washington, D.C. A news release was mailed to radio and television stations, newspapers, and interest groups throughout the state.

A public hearing was held in Alamogordo on May 28, 1980, to solicit public comment on the DEIS. Announcement of this meeting was made in the Federal Register, local newspapers, and additional news media. Although oral testimony and written statements were offered, most of them related primarily to the withdrawal of the lands (an unrelated action). There were no major controversial issues raised relative to the Draft EIS.

Final EIS (FEIS)

Comments received on the DEIS were reviewed and considered in the FEIS. The final document was filed with the Environmental Protection Agency on September 12, 1980, and an additional 30-day period for public comment was provided.

Implementation

Implementation of the decision will require prior concurrence from the Commanding General, Fort Bliss, Texas.

The first step in the implementation process will be the development of an overall grazing mangement system covering all 14 pastures scheduled to be completed by May 1981. The design of this system will be based on the present monitoring results, the phenological requirements of the key species, and changes in the grazing patterns expected due to the proposed improvements.

As the improvements for each pasture or system of pastures are completed, the corresponding portion of the management system can be implemented. An initial increase in AUMs (made available from areas that were previously not usable because of lack of water) can then be implemented and adjusted each year based on the results of the monitoring program. Adjustments to the grazing system or additional improvements will be indicated at this time if expected changes in grazing patterns are not taking place. The entire management system will be implemented when all proposed improvements are completed, which is estimated to be 12 years.

Administrative Actions

The following process will be adhered to each year in relation to livestock grazing on McGregor Range.

- Pastures to be grazed, numbers of AUMs, periods of grazing, and periods of rest will be identified based on a management system and monitoring from the previous year.
- A Notice of Intent on an Invitation to Bid will be issued and sent to individuals on the Las Cruces District Office mailing list as well as the news media covering parts of New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and Texas.
- An Invitation to Bid will be sent to those responding to Notice of Intent.
- Bidding will be either by sealed bid or oral bid to be held at a public auction at least two months prior to the start of the grazing period.
- Authorization to graze will be awarded to the highest bidder.

In addition to these administrative actions pertaining to grazing, improvement contracts will be awarded annually based on grazing receipts.

Rangeland Improvements

Seventeen and one-half miles of pipelines will be replaced; 38.5 miles of new pipeline will be installed; 19 wells will be drilled; 77 water troughs, 39 storage tanks, 5 dirt tanks, 3 corrals, and 47 miles of road will be constructed. Each year, for the first four years (from 1981-1984), one-fourth of the pipeline scheduled for replacement will be constructed. Any additional improvements during this period will be on a priority basis and dependent on the remaining rangeland improvement fund.

From 1985-1992, the remaining rangeland improvements will be completed. Any rangeland improvements which the antelope HMP recommends will be considered with this group of improvements.

All improvements are scheduled to be completed in 12 years.

Grazing Use Levels

Each year, a decision will be made as to which pastures are to be grazed and how many AUMs will be sold based on monitoring studies, the grazing system, and professional judgment. As improvements are completed, AUMs will be increased.

Appropriations

McGregor Range is currently funded from the sale of livestock forage. Each year's receipts will determine the number and kind of improvements that can be constructed. Current receipts have averaged $233,000. For the 1980-81 grazing season, 23,263 AUMs of livestock grazing were offered to the public and the average bid price per AUM was $6.53 for a total receipt of $151,973.

Replacement of the main pipeline and other large, expensive projects which require more than one year's grazing receipts to fund may require other funding alternatives.

Monitoring

Rangeland monitoring studies which are part of the existing management system will be continued as part of the decision. These studies include actual use, range condition and trend, utilization, and precipitation. Where the need arises, existing studies will be expanded. Precipitation will be recorded monthly while all other studies will be conducted annually. Data for all studies will be analyzed annually.

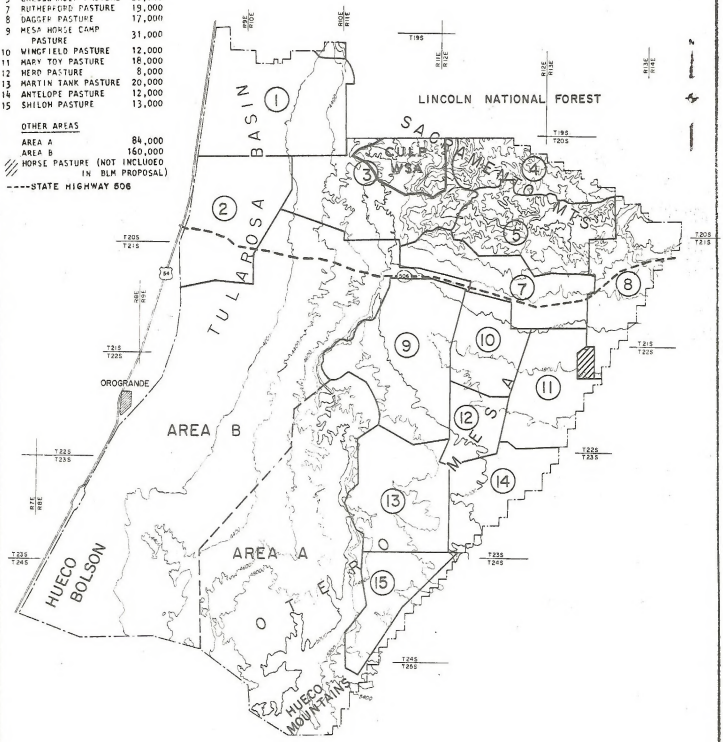
Wildlife monitoring will include annual browse utilization transects, pellet group transects, and fecal analyses.

Archaeological monitoring will include study plots and transects. This study will be conducted annually and analyzed at five year intervals.

The studies are designed to provide information necessary to determine the effects of the management actions applied to the various resources. An update report will be published annually which will indicate the results of monitoring studies. (See Table 2).

	EXISTING PASTURES	ACRES
1	CANFIELD PASTURE	31,000
2	COX WELL PASTURE	25,000
3	CULP PASTURE	32,000
4	LEE PASTURE	13,000
5	CRESSGARDEN PASTURE	20,000
7	RUTHERFORD PASTURE	19,000
8	DAGGER PASTURE	17,000
9	MESA HORSE CAMP PASTURE	31,000
10	WINGFIELD PASTURE	12,000
11	MARY TOY PASTURE	18,000
12	HERD PASTURE	8,000
13	MARTIN TANK PASTURE	20,000
14	ANTELOPE PASTURE	12,000
15	SHILOH PASTURE	13,000

OTHER AREAS	
AREA A	84,000
AREA B	160,000
/// HORSE PASTURE (NOT INCLUDED IN BLM PROPOSAL)	
----STATE HIGHWAY 506	



CONTOUR INTERVAL 200 FEET

SCALE IN MILES 0 1 2 3 4

McGREGOR EIS AREA

Exhibit A

Source: BLM Las Cruces District

The following table shows the progression made on McGregor Range from 1967 to 1980-81

TABLE 1
History of Grazing on McGregor Range

Year	Units Grazed	Acres Grazed	No. Cattle Grazed	AUMs Grazed	Average Bid per AUM	Total Dollars
1967	18,19	35,000	600	3,281	$1.42	$ 4,659.00
67-68	11, 14, 18, 19	67,000	800	7,068	2.05	14,471.00
68-69	1, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 18, 19	180,000	2,900	27,070	1.99	53,925.00
69-70	1,11,12,13, 14,15,16,18, 19,20	246,000	4,150	43,350	1.83	79,401.00
70-71	1,11,12,13, 14,15,16,18, 19,20	246,000	4,400	39,600	2.05	81,337.00
71-72	1,11,12,13, 14,15,16,18, 19,20	246,000	5,100	44,400	2.07	90,147.00
72-73	1,11,12,13, 14,15,16W,18, 19,20	233,000	5,300	42,300	2.51	106,092.00
73-74	1,11,12,13, 14,15W,16,18, 19,20	226,000	5,400	42,600	3.41	144,981.00
74-75	1,10,11,12, 13,14,15,16W, 18,19,20	233,000	4,850	36,700	4.39	160,965.00
75-76	1,10,11,12, 13,14,15,16S, 18,19,20	214,000	5,450	44,850	5.31	237,977.00
76-77	1,10,11,12, 13,14,15,16, 18,20	228,000	4,425	37,017	5.43	201,047.00
77-78	1,10,11,12, 13,14,15W, 16W,19,20,16S	209,000	4,025	34,020	3.81	119,132.00
78-79*	1,3,5,7,9,10, 11,13,14,15,4, 12,18 rested	229,000	4,775	38,330	4.73	187,305.00
79-80	1,3,4,5,8,9, 10,11,12,13, 14,15	227,000	4,916	44,250	5.38	230,258.00
80-81	4,5,7,10,13, 14,15	108,000	3,877	23,263	6.53	151,973.00

* Grazing Unit Numbers Changed

TOTAL 1,871,670.00

Table 2

Showing Progress on Implementation Schedule

Major Items	1980	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	
Development of AWP														To be completed by May 1981
Range Improvements														
Replace 17.5 mi. pipeline														To be completed by 1984
Install 38.5 mi. pipeline														
Drill 19 Wells														
Install 77 water troughs														
Install 39 storage tanks														
Build 5 dirt tanks														
Build 3 corrals														
Build 47 mi. road														
AUMs	42,300													To increase to 57,230
Implementation of Grazing Management System														To cover all 14 pastures (271,000)